A

Full and Authentick ACCOUNT OF *STEPHEN DUCK*, THE *Wiltſhire* Poet.

Of his Education; his Methods of Improving himſelf; how he firſt engag'd in Poetry; and his great Care in writing.

Of each of his particular Poems; of the firſt Encouragements he met with; and his original Sentiments on ſeveral Books, Things, *&c.*

In a LETTER to a *Member of PARLIAMENT.*

By *J— S—* Eſq; Poetry Profeſſor for the Univerſity of *OXFORD.*

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THE PUBLISHER TO THE *READER.*

TIS not material to tell you very minutely how the following Letter came into my Hands: As to what is neceſſary, I can take upon me to ſay, that it was really written by Mr. *Spence*, and that this is a true Copy of it. The Author, who is now Abroad, I hope will pardon me, for Endeavouring to make us able ſtill to enjoy thus much of his Converſation here at Home.

I own it has an unfair Look to publiſh any thing without the Conſent of the Writer. But as

a familiar Letter of this kind, cou'd ſcarce injure Mr. *Spence*'s Character, were it written otherwiſe than it is: and as this may be very entertaining to the World, I hope he will forgive this Freedom; and then I ſhall be entirely pleas'd, tho' it be only with being the Inſtrument of handing to the Publick what I think will be ſo agreeable to all Lovers of Poetry, and indeed to all Perſons that have any curioſity to know the Truth in a Caſe of ſo particular a Nature.

A

Full and Authentick

ACCOUNT

OF

STEPHEN DUCK.

SIR,

I Do not wonder that You ſhou'd deſire ſo particular an Account of *Stephen Duck*. He is really an extraordinary Man: and upon converſing with him Several times I went away, almoſt conſtantly, with greater Admiration of him than I came. I think I acquainted you in my former Letter about him, That I have paſs'd the greateſt part of Six Days with him, and had him Four Evenings entirely to my ſelf. This in all his original Simplicity, which is ſo ſoon to be loſt, I muſt tell you, I look upon as a very valuable Thing.

Were I to aſſure you, That the Author of the *Shunammite* had ſcarce any thing of what we call Education; when you read that Poem, you wou'd ſtill be apt to imagine, that he had more than really came to his Share. I ſhall therefore give you a minute Account of it, chiefly as I had it from his own Mouth.

To let you therefore into the whole Thread of this, 'tis neceſſary in the Firſt place to let

you know, that my Friend *Stephen*, had originally no other Teaching than what enabled him to read and write Engliſh, nor that any otherwiſe than at a Charity-School. He has never taken a Single Step toward any other Language. Arithmetick, you know, is generally join'd with this degree of Learning. That *Stephen* took a Pleaſure in; but he had almoſt entirely loſtit again, before hē began to teach himſelf, a Period of his Life, which you are not yet to expect.

About his Fourteenth Year, he was taken from this School; and work'd, with his Father, at Day-Labour, for Two or Three Months. After that his Father took a little Farm, and kept *Stephen* conſtantly at work; and that generally in the Field. This laſted for about Three Years: when his Father being forc'd to quit the Farm again, poor *Stephen* went to Service. He had then ſeveral little Revolutions in his Fortunes; liv'd ſometimes with one Farmer, and ſometimes with another: in low Employments always; generally, as a Threſher: Which you know was his Poſt when he came to be talk'd of, and to be ſent for by ſome Perſons of Diſtinction, who added very much to the Character that had been giv'n of him.

Theſe conſtant Employments had taken up ſo much of his Time and Thoughts, that he had forgot almoſt all the Arithmetick he had learn'd at School. However he read ſometimes a little by chance, and thought oft'ner. He had a longing after Knowledge; and when he reflected within himſelf on his want of Education, he begun to be particularly uneaſy, that he ſhou'd have forgot even ſomething of what he had learnt

learnt, at the little School he was at. He thought of this ſo often, that at laſt he reſolv'd to try his own Strength, and if poſſible to recover his Arithmetick again.

His firſt Attempt of this kind I take to have been almoſt Six Years ago. Conſidering the Difficulties the poor Fellow lay under, this Inclination for Knowledge muſt have been very ſtrong in him. He was then Married, and at Service: he had little Time to ſpare; he had no Books, and no Money to get any. But he was reſolv'd to go through with it; and accordingly us'd to work more than other Day-Labourers, and by that means got ſome little matter added to his Pay. This was to himſelf, and the over-plus at his own diſpoſal. With this he bought firſt a Book of Vulgar Arithmetick; then one of Decimal; and a third of Meaſuring of Land. All which by degrees, he made himſelf Maſter of; as he could get a little time, which was chiefly o' Nights, to read in.

Where there was ſuch a Deſire for Knowledge in any Particular, there muſt be good Senſe at bottom; and a Soul, at leaſt, ſomewhat above the common Converſation he muſt meet with in his poor State of Life. I have ask'd him, whom he had that he cou'd Talk and Converſe with in the Country; and was Pleaſed to find him, in this Particular, happier than I expected. He ſaid, He had one Dear Friend, that he mention'd with uncommon Affection. They uſed to Talk and Read together, when they cou'd ſteal a little Time for it. I think too, they ſometimes ſtudied their Arithmetick together. This Friend had been in a Service

at *London* for two or three Years: He had there learn'd a little which were good Books to read. He had purchaſed ſome, and *Stephen* had always the uſe of his little Library; which by this time poſſibly may be encreas'd to two or three Dozen of Books. This Friend knew no more out of Engliſh than *Stephen*: but by talking together they mutually improv'd each other. *Stephen* is all Simplicity; he ſays, "That his "Friend can Talk better than him, as having "been more uſed to Company; but that he "himſelf has been more uſed to Poetry, and "in that can do better than his Friend.

Had it not been for this, *Stephen* muſt have been plac'd on a level with *Hai Ebn Yokdhan* and the young *Hermes* in Mr. *Ramſay's Cyrus*: But any conſiderable Improvements, in ſuch an abſolute Solitude, agrees better with a Romance, than with an Account of what has really happen'd. Our retir'd Philoſopher had his Friend; and it ſeems to have been the greateſt Happineſs of his Life that he had one. They did not only Read, but Reaſon'd over Points together; and I have often thought, how agreeable a thing it wou'd have been, to have been conceal'd within hearing of them, when they were in the midſt of ſome of their moſt knotty Debates. We may imagine 'em both to have had very good natural Senſe, and a few good Books in common between them: Their Minds were their own; neither improv'd, nor ſpoil'd, by laying in a Stock of Learning: They were, perhaps, equally well inclin'd to learn; both ſtrugling for a little Knowledge: and, like a Couple of Boatmen, while they thought, perhaps, that they were only ſtriving

to

to Excel one another, they were really each Helping the other, and driving the Boat on the faſter.

Had I apprehended, that I ſhould ever have been ask'd for ſo particular an Account as you deſire, I wou'd have taken a Catalogue of each of their Studies. As it is I am not able to do that ſo diſtinctly as you might wiſh; but I can tell you pretty near all the Books that *Stephen* had chiefly converſed with, when I firſt ſaw him. I need not mention thoſe of Arithmetick again; nor his Bible. *Milton*, the *Spectators*, and *Seneca* were his firſt Favourites: *Telemachus*, and another Piece by the ſame Hand, and *Addiſon*'s Defence of Chriſtianity, his next. They had an Engliſh Dictionary, a ſort of an Engliſh Grammar; an *Ovid* of long ſtanding with them, and a *Byſhe*'s Art of Poetry of later acquiſition. *Seneca*'s Morals had made the Name of *L'Eſtrange* dear to them; and as I imagine might occaſion their getting his *Joſephus* in Folio, which was the largeſt Purchaſe in their Collection. They had one Volume of *Shakeſpear*, with Seven of his Plays in it. *Stephen* had read Three or Four other Plays; ſome of *Epictetus*, *Waller*, *Dryden*'s *Virgil*; *Pryor*, *Hudibras*; *Tom Brown*, and the *London Spy*. This may be an imperfect Account; but I hear Lady *H——d*, who call'd upon *Stephen* in the Country ſince I ſaw him, had the Curioſity to take an exact Catalogue of them all.

With theſe Helps *Stephen* is grown a good Poet, and no bad Philoſopher. I find by him, that from his Infancy, he has had a Caſt in his Mind toward Poetry. He has delighted as far back as he can remember in Ballads, and in Sing-

Singing. He ſpeaks of ſtrange Emotions that he has felt on the top Performances of the little Choir of Songſters in a Country Chancel: and mentions his firſt hearing of an Organ, as a remarkable Epocha of his Life. I find that Muſick ſometimes makes him melancholy: which I ask'd him, upon remembring that 'twas *Shakeſpear*'s Caſe before him; and he told me that upon hearing an Anthem, he has been forc'd to turn away, and has found his Eyes on a ſuddain full of Tears. This, no doubt, was a Melancholy of the pleaſing kind. He ſeems to be a pretty good judge too of a Muſical Line; but I imagine that he does not hear Verſes in his own Mind, as he repeats them. I don't know whether you underſtand me. I mean, that his Ideas of the Notes in a Verſe, and his manner of repeating the ſame Verſe, are often different: For he points out an harmonious Line well enough, and yet he ſometimes ſpoils its harmony by his way of ſpeaking it.

What firſt gave him a high taſte of Poetry was *Milton*'s *Paradiſe Loſt*. This came odly enough into his hands, and when I ſee you I'll tell you the Hiſtory of it. *Stephen* read it over twice or thrice with a Dictionary, before he cou'd underſtand the Language of it thoroughly. This, and a ſort of Engliſh Grammar, have been of great uſe to him.

Indeed it ſeems plain to me, that he has got Engliſh juſt as we get Latin. Moſt of his Language in Converſation, as well as in his Poems, is acquir'd by reading. The Talk he generally met with has been ſo far from helping him to the manner in which he ſpeaks, that it

muſt have put him even to the difficulty of forgetting his Premier-Language. You ſee this evidently in converſing with him. His common Talk is made up of the good Stile, with a mixture of the Ruſtick: tho' the latter is but very ſmall in proportion to the former.

He ſtudied *Paradiſe Loſt*, as we ſtudy the Claſſicks. The new Beauties in that Poem, that were continually opening upon his Mind, made all his Labour eaſy to him. He work'd all Day for his Maſter; and, after the Labour of the Day, ſet to his Books at Night. The Pains he has taken for the Pleaſure of Improving himſelf are incredible; but it has anſwer'd too beyond what one cou'd imagine: for he ſeems to underſtand even the great and deeper Beauties of that Poem tolerably well; and points out ſeveral particular Beauties, which it requires a nice and juſt Eye to diſcover.

'Twas his Friend that help'd him to the *Spectators:* they read 'em often, and admired them together; and often by themſelves. *Stephen* tells me that he has frequently carried them with him to his Work. When he did ſo, his method was to labour harder than any Body elſe, that he might get Half an Hour to read a *Spectator* without Injuring his Maſter. By this means he uſed to ſet down all over Sweat and Heat; and has ſeveral times caught Colds by it. This may ſeem to be too particular: but if it affects you as it has me, I ought to ſet it down; that you may not loſe the Pleaſure of ſo ſtrong an Inſtance of Honeſty and Induſtry mix'd together.

The *Spectators* improv'd his Underſtanding more

more than any thing. The Copies of Verſes ſcatter'd in thoſe Pieces, help'd on his natural Taſte: he was willing to try whether he cou'd not do ſomething like 'em. He ſometimes turn'd his own Thoughts into Verſe while he was at work; and at laſt begun to venture thoſe Thoughts a little to Paper. What he did of this kind was very inconſiderable: only ſcatter'd Thoughts, and generally not above four or five Lines on the ſame Subject: which, * as there was no body thereabouts that car'd for Verſes, nor any body that cou'd tell him whether they were Good or Bad, he generally flung into the Fire as ſoon as he had pleas'd himſelf enough in reading them.

Whatever care he took to burn theſe little Pieces, he found it not ſufficient to conceal it. The thing took air; and *Stephen*, who had before the Name of a Scholar among the Country People, was ſaid now to be able to write Verſes too. This was mention'd accidentally, about a Year ago, before a young Gentleman of *Oxford*, who ſent for *Stephen*, and after ſome Talk with him, deſired him to write him a Letter in Verſe. That Letter is the Epiſtle which ſtands the Laſt in his Poems, but was really the Firſt whole Copy of Verſes that ever he wrote. The Gentleman who employ'd him, upon reading thoſe Lines, thought 'em too Good to be his own; and gave him ſo little Encouragement, that here all was like to be loſt. *Stephen* might never have wrote any more, had not the Copy of this Epiſtle been left by chance at a Place, where it fell into the Hands of ſome Clergymen in the Neighbourhood. They were very well

* From Mr. *Stanley*'s Account.

well Pleaſed with it; and upon examining into the thing more cloſely, found the Man had a good deal of Merit. They gave him ſome Preſents, which as things ſtood then were a great Help to him; and encourag'd him to go on, as much as they cou'd.

This reviv'd his Spirits again: And, as he had wrote ſome Verſes on *Poverty* before the Epiſtle, after this he carried thoſe Thoughts farther, and finiſh'd the Copy on that Subject, as it ſtands in the printed Collection I ſend you: ſo that this is his Second Copy. You ſee I am very careful in ſettling the Chronology of his Poems: ſuch a Genius is a Curioſity; and one wou'd willingly know which are his firſt Productions.

The Compoſition which was next in order is that on his own *Labours:* That Subject was given him by *one of thoſe who firſt encourag'd his Taſte for Poetry: and after this was finiſh'd and applauded, he was employ'd from the ſame quarter in his *Shunammite.* As this far exceeded any of the reſt, I think from hence we may date the Æra of his riſing in his Character and Circumſtances. Upon this it was that Perſons of Diſtinction began to ſend for him different ways. In ſhort, it got him Fame enough to be pretty troubleſome to him at firſt; tho' it is likely to end in a much happier Settlement of Him and his Affairs, than cou'd ever have been dreamt of by him at his firſt ſetting out.

Among the firſt who had a Curioſity for ſeeing a Man of ſo particular a Character, was the Honourable Mr. *B——t:* and I believe *Stephen* had never, 'till that Viſit, ſeen three or

* By Mr. *Stanley.*

four Pieces of Gold together, that were his own to do what he wou'd with. 'Twou'd be tireſome to enumerate all the little Particulars of his good Fortune. The great Step was the Earl of *M——d*'s ſending for him into *Hamſhire*, where his Lordſhip was then on a Viſit. That great Critick in Men, as well as in all ſorts of Learning, very much approv'd of his Compoſitions; and yet was more ſurpriz'd with what he found to be in the Man, than he had been with any thing in his Writings. His Lordſhip, and another of the moſt Penetrating Men in *England*, examin'd him very minutely. His Anſwers were plain, and yet ſurprizing. After ſeeing him ſeveral times, and always Rewarding him, his Lordſhip form'd that Opinion of him, which ('tis generally thought) occaſion'd an opening to his laſt and higheſt Good-Fortune.

I need not tell you that the *QUEEN*, who is always fond of Merit, wherever She finds it, upon ſeeing his Pieces, and the Genius that appear'd thorough them, expreſs'd a particular Satisfaction in ſuch an Opportunity of doing Good. Her Majeſty reſolv'd immediately to take him out of his Obſcurity, and the Difficulties he had labour'd under. A Poetical Retirement was thought of: every thing was conſider'd with the greateſt Judgment: There was now more danger of his having too much, than of his continuing to have too little: the great Goodneſs of Her Majeſty condeſcended to proportion it ſelf to the Poor Man's Condition; and every thing was ſettled in ſuch a manner, as might render it moſt effectually a Reward and Bleſſing to him.

Were

Were one to write a Counterpart to *Pierius Valerianus*, I mean a Piece on the *Felicity of Poets*; it wou'd ſcarce afford a ſingle Inſtance that cou'd come up to this in all its Parts: and yet, I muſt ſay, I think the Man thoroughly deſerves his good Fortune. When you have read his Poems, and conſider the manner he has been bred up in, I doubt not you will think there is a great deal of Merit in them: But I aſſure you, they give but an imperfect Idea of their Author; and to know how much he deſerves, one ſhou'd Converſe with him, and hear on what Reaſons he omitted ſuch a Part, and introduc'd another; why he ſhortens his Stile in this place, and enlarges in that; whence he has ſuch a Word, and whence ſuch an Idea. This is the chief point of view as to his poetical Merit; and I'll give you whatever I can recollect of this kind in relation to his beſt Poem, *The Shunammite*.

In the firſt Place, I found upon Enquiry that he wrote by a Plan. He thought over all the Parts, as he intended to uſe them, before he made the Verſes; and ſettled the whole Management of it ſo far, that ev'n on his ſecond Caſting it, there was but one Part added to thoſe he had diſpos'd from the firſt. For a Poem of any length, no doubt 'tis as neceſſary to do this, as it is to have a Draught of a Houſe before you go to building it: and yet I believe moſt of our Poets have generally thought themſelves above it, or not thought of it at all. Tho' the *Shunammite* had the Story given, ſtill ſomething of this kind was convenient enough; becauſe in forming it anew, he did not make uſe of all the Materials before

him, and has brought in ſome of his own. He thought the ſtretching of the Prophet in ſo particular a manner, muſt ſound ſtrange. The ſending of the Servant is another Paſſage omitted by him; he ſaid, He did not know what to do with it, or how to make it ſhine. The Woman introduc'd to tell her Story is a new Caſt of his own: ſo is her Doubting, and then Confirming herſelf again, by a particular Induction of all *Eliſha*'s Miracles: ſo the bringing an Audience about her, and their Chorus's, when they join together in Congratulating her Happineſs; the latter of which cloſes the Poem in ſo proper and ſtrong a manner.

The noble Lord, who has been his greateſt Friend, among many other Queſtions to try him, ask'd him, Why he introduc'd a Perſon to tell all the Story in the *Shunammite*, and why he could not as well tell it himſelf. He ſaid, he had read *Pryor*'s *Solomon*; and that in reading it, *Solomon*'s ſpeaking Every thing touch'd him Particularly. He was then ask'd, Since it was to be ſpoken, why he did not rather chooſe the Prophet, as the Perſon of the greater Dignity, to ſpeak it. He ſaid to this, That the Woman was to be pitied: That there ſeem'd to him to be * ſome Expreſſions of the Woman in the Hiſtory, not fit for her to uſe; and which, if not omitted, might leſſen our regard and compaſſion for her: That if the Prophet had related the thing, he could not have omitted a word;

* Such as theſe:

Ver. 16. *And ſhe ſaid; Nay, my Lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thy Handmaid.*

Ver. 28. *Did I deſire a Son of my Lord? did I not ſay, Do not deceive me.*

but

but when the Woman did, ſhe might well be allow'd to ſoften her own Caſe; and to drop, now ſhe was cool, any thing wrong that ſhe had ſaid in the violence of her Grief and Paſſion. This is rather fuller in words than he expreſs'd it, but nothing I think is added to his meaning.

As *Milton* had been his Favourite Poet, you may wonder why none of his Pieces are in *Miltonick* Verſe. Indeed I was ſurpriz'd how he came to chooſe Rhime, and ask'd him the reaſon of it. He ſaid, he wrote the whole *Shunammite* (except the firſt Chorus) in Blank Verſe: that upon reading it over, he found his Language was not Sublime enough for it; and that therefore he was forc'd to write it all over again, and turn it into Rhime.

Upon reading over the Chapter and his Poem together, you will ſee how juſtly he ſhortens and enlarges the particular Paſſages. Beſides ſome things already mention'd, He drops ſeveral little Circumſtances in the Chapters. † On the other hand, in the Poem, he enlarges on the (1) Contentedneſs and Charities of the Woman; on the (2) Look and Attitude of the Prophet; on her (3) Thanks for bearing a Son; on (4) the Death of the Child; on the (5) Reaſons of her Confidence in the Prophet; in (6) pointing out the Prophet, when ſhe comes to him; and in (7) his Anſwer; in her (8) preſſing the Prophet more earneſtly to aſſiſt

† See 2 Kings, Chap. 4. Verſes 10. 12. 14. 25, 26, 27, 28, 29. 34 and 35.

(1) Line 33, to 49. (2) Verſe 55, &c. (3) Verſe 76. (4) Verſe 112, to 134. (5) Verſe 152, &c. See 205. (6) 216. (7) 219. (8) 232.

her;

her; in (9) pointing out the dead Child, his being (10) freed from Death, and her Thoughts (11) upon receiving him again into her Arms.

Any judge of Poetry will eaſily ſee at the firſt look, that there is a good Reaſon for ſinking the firſt, and for enlarging the latter, in every particular almoſt in which he has done either. I wo'nt except any thing, but his Omitting the * grateful Behaviour of the Woman to the Prophet, after her Child is reſtor'd to Life; and the Inſerting the † Deſcription of his Arbour on Mount *Carmel*. And even both of theſe, I believe, were well judg'd at the bottom. The Behaviour to the Prophet may be omitted from the difference of Time and Place. She was then with the Prophet, but in the Poem ſhe is with the People; and accordingly her Reſpects to the Prophet, in the laſt Verſe of the Hiſtory, are turn'd into Thanks to the greater Author of that Bleſſing, in the Entrance of the Poem. The Arbour is inſerted where there was a fit place for Deſcription; and ſerves to point out one of the chief Perſonages in the Poem, at a time when he ſhould appear in a ſtrong Light. This I have often obſerv'd to be *Homer*'s Intention in his frequent Deſcriptions of Plumes, Helmets, and other things, which ſeem idle, if conſider'd by themſelves; but in the Poem are almoſt conſtantly of uſe. *Stephen* indeed could not learn this from *Homer*; but he might learn it from their common Maſter, good natural Senſe.

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(9) 246. (10) 258. (11) 266.

* *Then ſhe went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herſelf to the ground, and took up her Son and went out.* 2 Kin. 4. 37.

† Verſe 211. in the *Shunammite*.

'Tis

'Tis agreeable to ſee what uſe he has made of his Reading, and how he has improv'd the thing, by obſerving ſome good Strokes in the Books he has met with. Upon my telling him, that I admired nothing more than his altering * the Prophet's Countenance as he does; he ſaid, He took that hint from *Telemachus*: where the young Prince comes to *Idomeneus* his Court, while they are ſacrificing. The Prieſt on ſeeing *Telemachus*, breaks off from what he was about; aſſumes a more inſpired air; and begins ſpeaking of his future Fortunes. This alteration of the Prophet's Countenance *Stephen* took from thence, but dropp'd the Wildneſs and Enthuſiaſm of it. His giving him a † Divine Look on another occaſion, was not from this Paſſage; but only becauſe he thought ſomething neceſſary to be added, to raiſe that particular Act, and to make it a little more conſiderable.

The Chorus in the cloſe of the *Shunammite*, he ſaid, was brought into his Mind by the * general Rejoycing of the Angels in *Milton*, upon God's Finiſhing the Creation of the World. The † firſt Chorus was not in the Work originally: he inſerted it when he new form'd it all into Rhime; ſo that That is an Imitation of the laſt. Criticks always find out ſomething more in their Authors, than they Themſelves ever deſign'd. I am aware of this; and will not therefore aſſert, that he intended thoſe regular Partitions of the Whole; by having a

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* From line 55, to 63. † 227.

* *Paradiſe Loſt*, Book 7. Line 565, and 602.

† *Shunammite*, Verſe 85.

Hymn

Hymn of Thankſgiving in the *Beginning*, in the *Middle*, and at the *End* of the Action.

In the true Original there were four Lines, which I ſee are omitted in the common printed Copies. They ſhould come in ſome where in that beautiful Paſſage of the dying Child.

Deluding Hope now ſtopp'd the falling Tears:
Now his augmented Pains increas'd my Fears.
By Hope and Fear alternate was I toſs'd;
Till Hope, in a ſad Certainty, was loſt.

Theſe he told me were taken from the ſtruggle of Paſſions in Perſons ſtriving for a Prize; in ſome Lines of Sir *Richard Blackmore*, which he met with in his *Byſhe's Art of Poetry*.

The ſuddain Stop, and expreſſive * Silence of the *Shunammite*, came into his Thoughts from his remembring the following Paſſage in *Milton*.

† His words here ended; but his meek Aſpect
Silent yet ſpake, and breath'd immortal Love
To mortal Men. ——————————

He had alſo been very careful as to ſingle words, and had Authorities to produce, more than cou'd be expected. For (1) *Flow'ry* Carmel, he quotes Mr. *Pope*; and the Prophet's Arbour on the Top of that Mount is cover'd with (2) Vines, on the Authority of Mr. *Sandys* in his Travels. For the words (3) *Aduſt*, and *Supernal*, he refers to *Milton*. (4) *Fanatick* he uſes according to the true, and not the vulgar

* Ver. 238. † *Paradiſe Loſt*, Book 3. Verſe 268.
The *Shunammite*, (1) Ver. 210. (2) V. 212. (3) V. 177, and 249. (4) Ver. 56.

ſenſe

ſenſe of the word; he had learn'd the proper meaning of it from his Dictionary. (5) *Dilated Heart*, as ſpoken of Sorrow, was what diſguſted a very good Critick: 'Tis certainly a Fault; but 'tis a Fault that *Stephen* was naturally enough led into by the common Notion and Expreſſions in the Country, of the Heart's *ſwelling* and being ready to *burſt* with Grief. (6) *Delegate* was not in originally; it was at firſt:

And *thou*, *Propitious Star*, which didſt preſide
Over his native Hour, his Actions guide.

This he apprehended might look too much like the Faith of an Aſtrologer: it might ſeem, he ſaid, to attribute too great an Influence to the Stars, and therefore he alter'd it.

He owns his Faults very readily; and if he thinks a Line of his better than ordinary, he will ſay ſo without any reſerve. In an Inſtance above, in the word *Dilated*; he ſaid, he thought 'twas a Fault; not that he ſaw it to be ſuch, but becauſe ſuch good Judges had told him ſo. He pointed out ſome other words that he ſuſpected, and ſome that he now ſees to be wrong. He wou'd commend too ſome of the Lines, that deſerv'd moſt to be commended. He ſeems to be exceedingly open and honeſt in every thing he ſays; and 'twou'd be very difficult for you to be with him a Week, as I have been, without going away very much his Friend.

Tho' I have been ſo long in ſhewing you how critically he has proceeded as to his own

(5) Ver. 143. (6) Ver. 92.

Works; I can't let you go, without telling you his Opinions too on the Works of others; particularly as to the Books in which he has been moſt converſant.

'Tis not yet three Year ago that he firſt met with *Milton*; and I believe that was the firſt Poet of real value that he ever ſtudied in earneſt. He has aſſur'd me, with all his uſual Innocence and Simplicity, That when he came afterwards to read *Addiſon*'s Criticiſms on *Milton* in the *Spectators*, 'Twas a high Pleaſure to him, to find many things mention'd there, in the Praiſe of *Milton*, exactly as he had before thought in reading him. Here we muſt depend on his Credit; which I need not tell you with me is very good. Upon his being ask'd, Which Part he lik'd beſt in the *Paradiſe Loſt*, he nam'd the Angel's account of the Creation, in the Seventh Book; and had the Fortune to hit on the favourite Part of the Gentleman who ask'd him the Queſtion, and who is reckon'd of as fine a Taſte as any Man in *England*.

The Name of *Milton*, whom he admires and dotes on ſo particularly, has not prevail'd on him enough to make him like his *Paradiſe Regain'd*. 'Twas in ſpeaking of theſe two Poems that he ſaid, He wonder'd how *Milton* cou'd write ſo incomparably well, where he had ſo little to lead him; and ſo very poorly, where he had more.

It has been ſaid, that he cou'd repeat almoſt all the *Paradiſe Loſt* by heart. I am ſure, he can repeat a great deal of it; and he ſays, that (before theſe late Hurries) he could repeat a great deal more. What may ſurprize you is this;

this; That in repeating he ſometimes improves on his Author by Miſtake. Thus in the Lines I have juſt now quoted to you out of *Milton*.

His words here ended; but his *meek Aſpect*
Silent yet *ſpake*, and breath'd *immortal* Love
To *mortal* Man. ———————

Stephen, when he had that occaſion of mentioning them, ſaid he did not remember them exactly; but he thought the words were,

———————His Aſpect meek
Breath'd Love immortal to Mankind. ——

The *Spectators*, you know, he has read with great Pleaſure, and great Improvement. I remember particularly, That on my happening to call 'em *Proſe*; he ſaid, "'Twas true, they "were *Proſe*; but there was ſomething in 'em "that pleas'd almoſt like Verſe." ---He mention'd, with more regard than uſual, The Critical Papers on Wit, thoſe on *Milton*; the *Juſtum & Tenacem* from *Horace*, Mr. *Pope*'s *Meſſiah*; and the ſeveral ſcatter'd ones, written in the Cauſe of Virtue and Religion. I wonder how he came to miſs thoſe on the Pleaſures of the Imagination: However it was, thoſe, he told me, he had never read.

He had formerly met with *Tom Brown*'s *Letters from the Dead*, and the *London Spy*, and read 'em, not without ſome Pleaſure: but after he had been ſome time converſant with the *Spectators*, he ſaid, "He did not care much to look "into them. He ſpoke of *Hudibras* in another manner: he ſaw a great deal of Wit in it,

and was particularly pleas'd with the Conjuror's Part in that Burleſque; but after all, 'tis not a Manner of writing that he can ſo ſincerely delight in, as in the Moral, the Paſſionate, or the Sublime.

Telemachus he admires much; and has taken ſome fine Strokes from it. Upon asking him what Plays he had read, He nam'd particularly *Julius Cæſar*, *Hamlet*, *Cato*, *Venice Preſerv'd*, and the *Orphan*. *Venice Preſerv'd* he ſaid gave him the moſt *horror*; a word, which I took notice he uſed ſometimes for Concern, and ſometimes in its proper Senſe. He cou'd not bear the Comick Parts in it. *Hamlet* he lik'd better than *Julius*: and in *Hamlet* pointed out that celebrated Speech, *To be, or not to be* &c. as his favourite Part merely of his own Taſte. He did not admire *Shakeſpear*'s Comedy, ſaid he was too high, and too low: yet he lik'd the *Grave-Diggers* well enough; that was pretty, and had Humour in it. I read over to him ſome of *Hamlet*, and thoſe artful Speeches of *Antony* to the People in *Julius Cæſar*. He trembled as I read the Ghoſt's Speech; and admir'd the Speeches and Turns in the Mob round *Cæſar*'s Body, more he ſaid than ever he had done before. As I was reading to him, I obſerv'd that his Countenance chang'd often in the moſt moving Parts: His Eye was quick, and buſy all the time: I never ſaw Applauſe, or the ſhifting of proper Paſſions, ſo ſtrong in any Face as in his. What ſurpriz'd me a little was, that *Cato* was his favourite Play of thoſe he mention'd: but then he thought very juſtly, that *Cato* ought to have liv'd, and to have ſuffer'd; and that a Chriſtian Poet ſhould not paint

paint a Man ſo Great, who is to Kill himſelf. He ſaid it was a mean thing too, and ſtrange, that a Poet, after he has been raiſing a Man almoſt to Heaven, ſhould make him ſink down all at once, and fall at laſt on the Point of his Dagger. His preferring the Play after this to all the other, may be owing perhaps to his great Love for Mr. *Addiſon* in his Proſe Writings; which ſhews the Juſtneſs of his Taſte ſo far, as well as any thing. He ſpoke, on another occaſion, in ſuch a manner as ſhow'd he had a very high Notion of the Happineſs of thoſe who liv'd with, and cou'd enjoy the ſight of Mr. *Addiſon*; and ſeems to reckon the ſeeing of *Milton* a thing capable of giving him a great deal of Pleaſure even in the other World.

I ſhall only add that he ſeems to have an excellent Moral Turn in his Thoughts. He has read and ſpeaks highly of the Arch-Biſhop of *Cambray*'s Demonſtration of the Being of a God, and Mr. *Addiſon*'s Defence of the Chriſtian Religion. He ſaid, that they touch'd his Mind, and that nothing did ſo well as when one's Reaſon is mov'd by what is ſaid. He had lik'd the little he had read of *Epictetus*; but 'twas *Seneca* that had made him Happy in his own Mind. He ſeems as yet not to be hurt at all by the Applauſes that have been giv'n him, and to have been perfectly contented with his Condition before. When he had only receiv'd ſome Preſents from Gentlemen in the Country, he was quite eaſy as to his Circumſtances. I have got my Wiſh, (ſays he) I deſired to pleaſe the Gentlemen who ſet me about any thing; and have got about Twenty Pound beſide; and indeed it was bad with us before.

before. The only thing then that he was ſolicitous about was, how he might ſucceed as to the Poetry he ſhould be employ'd in. This was his chief Concern: but that I found by him, not to be out of a deſire of Fame, ſo much as from a Principle of Gratitude; to pleaſe his Friends that had been ſo Generous to him. He was not lifted up with the Character he had got; and talk'd of Fame abſolutely like a Philoſopher. After his beſt Fortune, many of his Friends told him the Danger of being Vain; and if he ſhould once be ſo, that then All was loſt. He ſaid, that he cou'd not well tell what they meant; that he did not know what it was to be Vain: but ſince ſo many Great Men, who knew the World ſo much better than he did, were apprehenſive for him on that head; he begun to be terribly alarm'd at his Danger, tho' he had no ſettled Ideas of what it was. He was told upon this, that he ſhou'd never ſpeak too highly in Praiſe of the Poems he had written. He ſaid, If that was all, he was ſafe; that was a thing he cou'd never do, for he could not think highly of 'em: Gentlemen indeed, he ſaid, might like 'em, becauſe they were made by a poor Fellow in a Barn; but that he knew as well as any Body, that they were not really good in themſelves.

Theſe things, I own, appear'd to me many of them very wonderful: I went off with a real Friendſhip for the Man: and my Mind is yet warm'd with his Good Senſe and his Virtues. I know not whether this may not make me expreſs ſome things in a manner rather too high: but the Main Lines of the Picture, I aſſure you, are all true; the Colouring may poſſibly in

ſome

ſome Parts be too ſtrong; tho' intended only to ſhew them in a full Light. I am not conſcious to myſelf of any voluntary Falſhood in his Favour: the Facts you may certainly depend upon; tho' you may take down an Expreſſion now and then a degree or two lower, if you pleaſe; to allow for the paſſionate Fondneſs I have for ſo many Merits, and ſo much Humility join'd together.

Thus, Sir, I have obey'd your Commands as faithfully as I am yet able. You deſir'd me not to ſpare Paper: but to ſend you a Book rather than a Letter. You ſee I have taken you at your word; and that I am reſolv'd in this, as well as in every thing elſe, to ſhew you how punctually I wou'd ever be,

SIR,

Your moſt humble Servant,

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